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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

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Chapter ____ . DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION OF METHODOLOGICAL WORK

1. The Commission considered item 10 of its agenda at its 447th meeting, on 11 February 1991. It had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on general development and integration of methodological work, including experience and progress made in international classifications (E/CN.3/1991/24, sects. I and II.A, B and C) and on updated information on the work of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (E/CN.3/1991/30, sect. IX) and the report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on its thirteenth session (E/CN.3/1991/2, sect. V).

2. The Commission noted with satisfaction that the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 3 (ISIC, Rev.3) had been published and distributed to the statistical offices of Member States, the regional commissions and international organizations. Attention was drawn to the importance of correspondence tables between ISIC, Rev.2, and ISIC, Rev.3, which, for many countries, were considered to be useful tools for the implementation of ISIC, Rev.3. The Commission acknowledged the importance and usefulness of the introduction to ISIC, Rev.3, and noted with satisfaction that it was in full conformity with the current draft text of the revised SNA. In addition, some members from transition countries indicated that the introduction and detailed explanatory notes were found useful for their work during the transition period.

3. The Commission expressed satisfaction that the provisional Central Product Classification (CPC) had been submitted for publication some months ago, but urged that its publication and dissemination should be accelerated because a number of countries were waiting to use it in their work. The Commission was pleased to note that some Member States in the process of revising their national classifications were already making use of the provisional CPC in its draft form. The view was expressed that it would be useful to obtain information on the ways in which the provisional CPC was being implemented in various countries.

4. The view was also expressed that work on the development of conversion keys between ISIC, Rev.3, and the Classification of Branches of the National Economy (CBNE) of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) should be accelerated to assist countries in transition to implement international economic classifications. It was proposed that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat share the workload in that exercise with the countries concerned, in co-operation with the Statistical Division of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in order to speed up the process of developing the detailed conversion keys. One member requested that assistance be provided during all stages of implementation of ISIC, Rev.3, and should not be limited to workshops and ad hoc advisory services.

5. The Commission noted that the work on international trade statistics and shipping statistics was benefiting from a high degree of cooperation among the various organizations involved. The Commission was informed that the Customs Cooperation Council (CCC) planned to work on amendments to the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) effective 1 January 1992. There were over 200 amendments, many of which were editorial but some of which might affect the correlation between HS and the Standard International Trade Classification, Revision 3 (SITC, Rev.3), that had been established. A major revision of HS was also under way in accordance with the provisions of the Harmonized System Convention which would be implemented in January 1996. The representative of CCC repeated the invitation he made at the twenty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission for statisticians to participate in the revision process. The Commission considered that it was important to maintain the correlation between the two classifications, although it recognized that too frequent changes in statistical classifications were not desirable. The point was made that, in the absence of changes to SITC, Rev.3, consequent to the revision of HS, countries or organizations that converted data from HS into SITC, Rev. 3, would have to make their own interpretations, which might differ, and that was considered undesirable. The Statistical Commission requested its Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination to consider at its fourteenth session the question of revising SITC, Rev.3, in the light of the amendments to HS scheduled for implementation in January 1992. In view of the rapid development in technology, the Commission considered that there was a need to review international nomenclature more regularly.

6. The Commission also supported the work under way in the Customs Cooperation Council for the introduction of standard quantity units at the six-digit level of HS. The existing United Nations recommendations, concepts and definitions for

international trade statistics made reference to quantity units, but additional work on standardization in that field was important for both international trade and transport statistics. The Commission welcomed the work on the Harmonized System Commodity Database, which would facilitate the application of HS by various users and would contribute to improving the quality of trade statistics.

7. The Commission expressed its appreciation to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for providing information on and a demonstration of the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA). It welcomed the introduction of version 2.3 of ASYCUDA, which had an improved module for extraction of statistical data, and the software package EUROTRACE developed by EUROSTAT, both of which were expected to enhance the capability of developing countries to compile international trade statistics and thus improve the availability and timeliness of international trade statistics. The Commission noted that 31 countries had implemented or were implementing ASYCUDA and another 57 countries were at earlier stages of investigation or establishing a project.

8. The Commission welcomed the cooperation between the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and UNCTAD, whereby the Statistical Office collected data on goods loaded and unloaded in international seaborne trade and UNCTAD compiled that data with estimates to meet their needs. It reiterated its strong support for resumption of the work on international seaborne trade statistics by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, should additional resources become available.

9. In the field of energy statistics, the Commission noted the work on a new publication on concepts and methods to update a technical report previously issued in 1978 which would serve as a manual for developing countries to improve their energy statistics methodologies and data compilation activities. The Commission also welcomed the various cooperative activities in that field and the cooperation between the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and the State Committee of the USSR on Statistics on the holding of a workshop on petroleum statistics in the Soviet Union in October 1991.

10. The suggestion was made that the paper might usefully be structured to provide an overall report on methodological development. The Commission noted that the document succeeded in keeping the Commission informed of developments in methodological work in certain fields that were important but that did not call for separate documents at this time and on which no major discussions of methodological issues was expected. It was also a response to the request by the Statistical Commission to reduce the amount of documentation for its sessions by summarizing work in areas in which no major discussion was expected. Methodological development was treated extensively in the relevant documents under other agenda items and it would be extremely difficult and a duplication to give an overall report on methodology within the page limit of the document.

Action taken by the Commission

11. The Commission:

(a) Welcomed the report on progress in international classifications, international trade and transport statistics and energy statistics and the cooperative efforts contributing to success in those fields, particularly with the Customs Cooperation Council;

(b) Strongly endorsed the proposed work by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat on developing indexes, conversion keys, correspondence tables and related aids for the implementation of ISIC, Rev.3, and the provisional CPC in close cooperation with other international organizations and Member States;

(c) Recommended that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat provide guidance to countries in implementing ISIC, Rev.3, and the provisional CPC, including provision of necessary technical co-operation and supplementary documentation;

(d) Welcomed the proposal to share the work of developing detailed conversion keys between ISIC, Rev.3, and CBNE among the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, the Statistical Division of ECE, EUROSTAT, OECD and several countries in transition;

(e) Reconfirmed the request made at its twenty-fifth session that the Secretary-General submit to the Commission, at its twenty-seventh session, a progress report reviewing national and international work and needs in the field of implementation of ISIC, Rev.3, and the provisional CPC;

(f) Requested the Working Group to consider at its fourteenth session the question of revising SITC, Rev.3, in the light of the amendments to HS scheduled for implementation in January 1992.
